

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LAGOS 04058 101122Z

45

ACTION AF-18

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SUBJECT: DROUGHT IN NIGERIA

REF: LAGOS 10289

SUMMARY: WHILE DROUGHT CONDITIONS PERSIST IN NORTH, EARLY RAINS GIVE HOPE THAT CURRENT GROWING SEASON MAY OFFER SOME RELIEF. FMG AND STATE OFFICIALS CONTINUE DISPLAY LITTLE CONCERN OVER SITUATION, AND THERE IS STILL NO EVIDENCE ANY REQUEST FOR EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE LIKELY TO BE FORTHCOMING. END SUMMARY

1. EARLY RAINS ACROSS MUCH OF NORTHERN NIGERIA HAVE RAISED HOPED THAT CURRENT GROWING SEASON MAY BRING MORE NORMAL CROPS AND OFFER RELIEF FROM DROUGHT SITUATION WHICH HAS PLAGUED AREA FOR PAST SEVERAL YEARS. SOME RAINS HAVE ALREADY BEEN RECORDED IN BOTH KANO AND MAIDUGURI, AND SOME FARMERS ARE ALREADY BEGINNING THEIR PLANTING. SIZE OF FINAL CROP WILL OF COURSE DEPEND ON TOTAL RAINFALL THROUGHOUT GROWING SEASON, SO THAT IT IS TOO EARLY TO PREDICT WITH CONFIDENCE THAT PROBLEM WILL NECESSARILY BE RESOLVED IN THIS WAY.

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PAGE 02 LAGOS 04058 101122Z

2. MEANWHILE, FMG AND STATE OFFICIALS CONTINUE TREAT ENTIRE DROUGHT PROBLEM IN LOW KEY AND EVIDENCE LITTLE CONCERN. FUNDS ANNOUNCED LAST DECEMBER (REFTEL) FOR BULK FOOD PURCHASES HAVE NOT BEEN UTILIZED, IN PART BECAUSE FEDERAL AND STATE AUTHORITIES DIFFER AS TO METHOD FOR PURCHASE GRAINS. FMG INSISTS ALL BUYING BE HANDLED BY NIGERIAN NATIONAL SUPPLY COMPANY (NNSC) ON BASIS STATE ESTIMATES OF REQUIREMENTS, WHILE STATE OFFICIALS WISH ARRANGE OWN IMPORTS DIRECTLY AND HAVE FAILED PROVIDE NNSC WITH INFORMATION NEEDED FOR LATTER TO ACT.

3. DESPITE ABSENCE OF EXPECTED IMPORTS, MISSION OFFICERS TRAVELING IN NORTHERN NIGERIA REPORT SEEMING ADEQUACY OF FOODSTUFFS IN LOCAL MARKETS, THOUGH PRICES ARE HIGH. STATE GOVERNMENTS IN AFFECTED AREA ARE OPERATING SUBSIDIZED FOOD PROGRAMS IN NORTHERNMOST DISTRICTS, PARTLY AS DEVICE TO KEEP POPULATION FROM MOVING TO CITIES, BUT ELSEWHERE IN REGION FOODSTUFFS ARE BEING SUPPLIED THROUGH NORMAL MARKET PROCESSES. FOR MOST PART, THESE HAVE COME FROM PURCHASES IN SOUTHERN STATES BY BOTH GOVERNMENTS AND PRIVATE TRADERS, WITH LATTER EVIDENTLY DOING MOST OF JOB IN SIMPLE SEARCH FOR PROFITS.

4. BOTH FMG AND STATE OFFICIALS INSIST THAT SITUATION IS COMPLETELY UNDER CONTROL AND INDEED DOES NOT EVEN CONSTITUTE A "PROBLEM". GENERAL GOWON'S APRIL 1 BUDGET SPEECH MADE NO MENTION OF DROUGHT OR DROUGHT RELIEF EFFORTS, AND NORTHERN OFFICIALS INSIST THAT ALL CITIZENS ARE GETTING FOOD THEY REQUIRE. WHERE INDIVIDUALS ARE UNABLE PURCHASE FOOD BECAUSE DROUGHT HAS CUT OFF THEIR INCOME, OFFICIALS INSIST THEIR NEEDS ARE BEING MET EITHER THROUGH SUBSIDIZED FOOD PROGRAMS OR THROUGH EXTENDED FAMILY SYSTEM.

5. ACCORDING TO OFFICIALS AND OUTSIDE OBSERVERS, NORTHERN POPULATION HAS BEEN SWOLLEN BY NUMBER OF MIGRANTS FROM NIGER, CHAD AND OTHER SAHEL COUNTRIES WHO HAVE CROSSED BORDERS IN SEARCH OF BETTER CONDITIONS. FMG OFFICIALS INSIST THESE NEWCOMERS ARE TREATED ON PAR WITH NIGERIAN CITIZENS, SO THAT NIGERIA IS SUBSTANTIALLY EASING BURDEN ON ITS NEIGHBORS BY CARING FOR PORTION OF THEIR POPULATIONS.

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PAGE 03 LAGOS 04058 101122Z

6. COMMENT: AS REPORTED IN REFTEL AND PREVIOUS CABLES, BOTH FEDERAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS TAKE VERY RELAXED VIEW OF DROUGHT SITUATION AS IT AFFECTS NIGERIA AND FEEL CONFIDENT THEY CAN MEET ALL NEEDS FROM THEIR OWN RESOURCES. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, WE CONTINUE BELIEVE IT HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT FMG WILL SEEK ANY FORM OF EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE FROM USG OR OTHER POTENTIAL DONORS.

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